

'This Place': The Culture of Queen's Park¹

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Trying to describe the culture of Queen's Park after only ten months experience may seem presumptuous, and perhaps it is. Yet in some ways, an intern is particularly suited to this endeavour. One of an intern's primary functions is to observe, and thereby to learn as much about the inner workings of the Ontario Legislature as possible. Interns have freer and broader access to people, places and parties than virtually anyone else at Queen's Park.

Interns are the apprentices of the Legislature, though we could also be described as the legislative team mascots. We are highly visible, and a wide range of people make it their business to teach us and help us along. At the same time, we are generally perceived as non-threatening, both because we are present for a limited time, and because of the programme's reputation for non-partisanship and discretion. The result is that we get to see under the surface right away, and people are quite free about what they say around us. We are of Queen's Park and yet separate from it, and therefore perfectly placed to observe it.

I have no intention of damaging the interns' reputation for discretion and confidentiality. The culture of Queen's Park is there for anyone who is part of it to see; indeed, this description may seem self-evident. If so, then I have succeeded. Culture, like politics, is perception; and perceptions held in common create reality. It is this reality I seek to understand.

I

Over the past decade, researchers in organizational behaviour have moved away from structural or system approaches toward a more interpretive framework based on the concept of organizational culture. They have begun to study the identity of organizations, rather than simply their attributes. This change came about because:

... there is a rather curious and troubling distance between the generalized principles which have been postulated for the behaviour of individuals, groups and organizations and the specific, always contextual understandings and explanations given by social actors that provide purpose and meaning to their behaviour.²

Organizations consist of human beings; their reality lies in the hearts and minds and values of the people within them. Structures in organizations are both formal and informal. There are structures based on organizational charts, rule books and budgets, and structures based on shared perceptions, expectations and ways of doing things.

Organizational culture theory places emphasis on informal structure and seeks to identify the underlying pattern of assumptions and values which help define how people behave. The content and meaning of culture are passed on through communication networks and symbolic action. An organization's culture evolves as new members come to an understanding of its culture and history. As well, new members change the culture by becoming part of it. Similarly, the culture also changes as members leave.

The strongest organizational cultures have the greatest consensus of values and meaning; this occurs more easily in smaller units. Sub-cultures within an organization become important in this context because they can either reinforce or undermine the broader culture. During periods of rapid change in an organization or its environment, a strong culture can be an important stabilizing force. Consensus and security among group members will help the organization weather change with its root values intact, while allowing it to adapt to new circumstances. The organizational culture will also adapt. Culture management is thus vital to the success of organizations in transition.

II

The culture of Queen's Park is both universal and variable because of the constant process by which new members of the organization adapt to the culture and change it. Identification is both with the Legislature as a whole, and with the sub-cultures of caucuses, assembly staff, political leaders, backbench members, and political staff. Most of the following discussion will refer to the culture of members of the Ontario

Legislature, though much of it may be applied to other sub-culture groups as well.

The ideological basis of activities at Queen's Park tends to reinforce strong organizational culture. Values, symbols and tradition are the stuff of legislative politics. Strong emphasis is placed on group identification and therefore on group values. The strength of ideological teams or sub-cultures create cultural continuity as new group members struggle to belong and to assimilate team values. In addition, political stability is an important value of the broader political culture within which Queen's Park operates. Each of the three traditional parties plays a consistent ideological role in Ontario's political culture, and these roles are represented in the microcosm of Queen's Park.

Yet dramatic change is also the nature of legislative politics. After each election, the membership of the group changes and key individuals may be lost. Expectations dictated by Ontario's political environment may also change. New players seeking to put their stamp on Queen's Park may change or disrupt the culture.

The existence of permanent sub-cultures also creates cultural variations at any specific time. Each team has its own cultural norms which set it apart as a sub-culture. The general culture does not necessarily develop smoothly; old values and ways of doing things may be re-asserted as a result of change.

III

Much can be learned about an organization's culture by examining how newcomers are integrated into it. Most people who come to Queen's Park already know someone there. MPPs know people through party connections or campaigning. Political staff often know the member from the riding, or have worked for the party. Some people "come down from Ottawa".

Partly because of this phenomenon, a major means of learning the ropes at Queen's Park is through informal contact with experienced members of the culture. While this may be true of all organizational cultures, it is essential to Queen's Park. New members must establish themselves quickly as part of their caucus teams. Relationships with older members not only teach newcomers how to get along, but reinforce the value of political experience which balances raw talent in the

caucus system. In this way, new members become part of the sub-culture, rather than threats to it. They avoid the isolation which can hurt individual legislative careers and harm the caucus team through fragmentation.

Queen's Park is unusual in that there are few real strangers to the organization. Most newcomers already have rudimentary networks when they arrive, and naturally depend on these previous contacts to help them complete the process of cultural integration, thus reinforcing cultural continuity. Building more sophisticated networks is an individual process, which will be discussed below.

A tremendous amount can be discovered about Queen's Park culture through storytelling. Anecdotes offer clues regarding expectations and behaviour, teach values, and help newcomers sort out the cultural players and history. It is astonishingly easy to become enshrined in the folklore of Queen's Park. Storytelling warns novices that cultural gaffes can haunt them for a long time!

Partly because activities at the Legislature are relatively unstructured – daily tasks vary widely in content, and crises are the norm – there is little in the way of formal induction procedures. New members have a few days of seminars with assembly officers. Documents such as *The Standing Orders*, *Guide to Services*, and caucus and committee assignments give newcomers an idea of the formal structure and rules of Queen's Park. But these are only the starting or end points of the real business of the Legislature, which is carried on between the individuals involved.

Most people, therefore, learn 'by the seats of their pants', and by making mistakes. This is a significant *rite de passage*, and is not simply due to a lack of better services. One is told upon arrival at Queen's Park that "this is a very political place", meaning that people lacking an innate sense of politics are unlikely to survive. The proof, in this case, is in the pudding, since people who don't learn the ropes do tend to disappear.

Again, this is an individual process, though it is necessary to be observant and sensitive to interpersonal dynamics. Everyone at Queen's Park has a personal history and a set of biases. Newcomers may avoid political landmines by being aware of who they are dealing with at all times and by judiciously curbing their tongues. One former member

recounted what a veteran MPP had told him when he first arrived: "More people talk their way out of this place than talk their way into it." In the highly competitive atmosphere of Queen's Park, though, shrinking violets can be easily ignored and 'idea people' are valued. The trick, therefore, is to be visible without making yourself conspicuous.

Everybody at Queen's Park has been through the trial of initiation, and most will make some allowances for inexperience. People generally respond positively to questions, and are willing to discuss what they do. Experience and political savvy are highly valued; asking questions gains useful information and enhances others' status and self-esteem, thereby strengthening contacts.

Teamwork and common cause are very important at Queen's Park, especially within sub-cultures. Since individual failure often means team failure, it is in everyone's best interest that newcomers not be allowed to blunder into major errors. Curiosity, willingness to learn and enthusiasm are indispensable qualities for individuals seeking greater responsibility on the team. For a newcomer, especially, naivete is better than risking the appearance of arrogance or pretention. People watch for newcomers to make mistakes; whether it is to help them up or put them down is largely up to the novice.

Mistakes, therefore, are not absolute. Issues flare up and die down just as quickly. As Treasurer and Government House Leader Robert Nixon observed:

... as is so often the case in politics, particularly when one gets oneself into some trouble, which from time to time all of us do...a month later one cannot remember what the big deal was all about.³

On the other hand, a few careless comments can earn a crippling reputation for poor political instincts.

It is not necessary to be right all the time, but to be right about the important things most of the time, and to know that the important things are often the small things. It is also important not to make the same mistake twice, and to stop making mistakes altogether after an initial grace period.

The manner of recovery from mistakes is also important. Premier Peterson recovered and even gained political credibility from potentially

serious mistakes of his government, by openly and ingenuously admitting error and being seen to correct it. The Elinor Caplan and René Fontaine conflict-of-interest cases exemplify this tactic. The alleged offenders were promptly removed from cabinet posts, legislative committees were set to examine conflict allegations, and revision of conflict-of-interest rules initiated.

Conversely, Peterson lost credibility by stubbornly refusing to admit that a public joke insinuating criminal tendencies in former Premier Bill Davis was in bad taste. Ministerial conflict-of-interest brought grudging recognition of Peterson's political acumen; his jokes earned him a reputation for foot-in-mouth disease.

It is hard to overestimate the role informal communication networks play in the culture of Queen's Park. Informal communication travels faster, and tends to give a fuller, more political picture of what is going on than formal communications. Personal relationships are invaluable for the access to information they offer. Situations change hourly at Queen's Park; staying on top of it all can increase political effectiveness immeasurably. Decisions emerge from a complex jumble of stimuli. It is important to be aware of influences at all levels, and informal communication networks are effective this way.

It is often said that at Queen's Park there are "no friends, no secrets", but this is more truism than truth. The primal value placed on credibility and discretion, against a backdrop of constant informal communication, is a Queen's Park paradox. Not much goes on that can't be found out or pieced together from several sources. Information is the stock-in-trade of the legislative grapevine, and everybody uses everybody else to get it. Yet the whole structure runs on trust, indicating there must be both friends and secrets.

The more discrete people tend to receive the most information, yet reputations for credibility are gained through offering information. Individuals walk a thin line between being useful, reliable sources and blabbermouths. Once a reputation for credibility is lost, there is almost no way to regain it. There is a subtle turning away and tuning out, and the individual finds himself in the wilderness of Queen's Park ignorance.

There are three general rules to trading information. Tapdancing with the truth is acceptable and expected; only the politically naive are

credulous. But outright lies are bound to be discovered and almost automatically ruin credibility. Revealing something which materially damages one's own sub-culture tends to be resented by both sides. A corollary special case is the member who crosses the floor. He is hated by the group he left and often distrusted by the group he joins. Finally, except with very small and trusted circles, nothing said is off the record.

The value placed on credibility and honesty may also be seen in members' relations with the press.⁴ The Press Gallery is a central switch-point of Queen's Park's communication networks. Reporters make their living by finding out inside information. Members use the media to disseminate strategic information and improve their public profiles. It is a symbiotic relationship, based on trust in the best interests of both sides. In the paradoxical nature of trust at Queen's Park, though, each side expects to be deceived or at least used by the other!

All members agree that long-term political success is at least partly dependent on good media relations. Over the years, members carefully build their credibility as experts or sources on certain issues. As one member put it: "spoon feed [the press], but be honest about it."⁵ Dishonesty, or repeated inaccuracy can destroy credibility. Resulting ostracism by the Press Gallery can seriously damage a member's political effectiveness.

The relationship between the press and the members used to be much cozier than it is today. The two groups socialize less together and members don't drop by the Press Gallery lounge as they frequently did in the past. This is one aspect of the increasing professionalization of the Legislature. The stakes are higher, and so is the tension in this relationship.

Especially for government members, there is a conflict between the desire for publicity and the need to be a team player. Voters like to see their local member sticking up for them in the Legislature, but publicly criticizing government policy, or asking embarrassing questions is dangerous to a government backbencher's career. Good press can bring notice or acclaim from party leaders, but few members want a reputation as a maverick. MPPs tend to be people who enjoy the limelight, yet telling a member he is on the front page of the *Globe and Mail* will usually strike fear into his heart.

Again, there may be dubious advantage in being noticed. New

members quickly learn that nothing they say is off the record. They are no longer free-speaking individuals. They are responsible to their party and to its leadership, and accountable for their opinions. A member's press relations can be a good measure of his political astuteness.

Building networks at Queen's Park is not easy, especially because pushiness is frowned upon; it doesn't do to seem too eager to get to know someone. Parties and other social events are important ways to meet new people and to broaden relationships. A Queen's Park wine and cheese can be hard work. Political points are won and lost as individuals perform in the social forum which can be as important as the more formal legislative arena.

Politics is a face-to-face business. It is not enough at Queen's Park just to speak on the phone or to correspond. It is essential to get out into the halls, cafeteria or dining room, to observe the subtle interplay and chat to people on the way. A surprising amount can be learned by observing who is having a quiet word with whom. Various charity and volunteer events at Queen's Park provide opportunities for people to make contacts outside their normal work circles.

Certain individuals at Queen's Park act as hubs around which several different networks wheel. These tend to be less partisan people with cross-party connections. They are important in bridging the gulf between caucus sub-cultures and facilitating strategic information-trading across party lines.

It is more difficult now than a few years ago to build networks. There are a great deal more staff now, so that it is harder to recognize people. On the other hand, the influx of new staff has made Queen's Park less of an exclusive club. There are more new people in the same boat, and this can encourage alternate networks.

Members' offices have spread out through the Legislative Building and across the street to the Whitney Block. Staff on both sides of Queen's Park Crescent find it difficult to simply wander over and get to know people without some excuse. Ministers and parliamentary assistants' offices are all over downtown Toronto. This has caused fragmentation, especially in the small Liberal caucus of the Thirty-third Parliament. Physical absence from the main building makes it more difficult to keep in touch with what goes on. It is much harder to 'hang out' when it is a special trip to go to the main building.

Caucus services are much more comprehensive than they have ever been, including research and word-processing services. Combined with increasing use of the computer system which links much of Legislature, this has had the effect of isolating people within their offices and caucus sub-cultures.

With the advent of television in the House, members and staff spend less time in and around the Chamber. The Chamber's East Lobby and Government Undergallery are still important networking locations, because during Question Period, staff from the ministries, from the government caucus and from the House Leader's Office come together. The Opposition West Lobby, however, is almost deserted, further decreasing the personal contact between the opposition parties that ideological distance already discourages.

The end of night sittings has reduced the amount of time members spend hanging around and going out to dinner, and the lounge in the basement of the North Wing is gone. The Liberal caucus office lounge does provide a meeting place for government members, but only some avail themselves of the opportunity. Certain Conservative members gather for drinks in private offices, but this tends to promote cliques in the PC Party rather than general camaraderie.

There are thus fewer natural meeting points at Queen's Park than there used to be, and they have not been supplemented artificially. This has made it more difficult for new people to integrate themselves, and has therefore fragmented the culture of Queen's Park. The place is becoming more impersonal as it grows in scale. Similar factors have also affected members' cross-party relationships, as will be discussed later.

IV

The question of members' political survival at Queen's Park is problematic, and depends very much on individual attitudes and behaviour. Bad reputations can be made very quickly at the Legislature, but good reputations take a long time to develop.

Queen's Park is still a very small place, and gossip as well as information travels through informal channels. Gossip flourishes partly because the people attracted to the political life tend to be those who get a thrill out of knowing the 'inside dope'. There are no real rules about gossip, except perhaps, that you don't publicly discuss your colleagues' personal

problems or proclivities unless they threaten their job performance. Even then, members generally refrain from hanging each others' dirty laundry in public. This may be simple fear of reprisal in kind, but it may also be an expression of their common cause as members of the sub-culture of members.

Cross-party sensitivities and competitiveness create a climate where misunderstandings are common and motives are likely to be impugned. There is a readiness to take offense and to believe in conspiracies, which can escalate into a battle mentality during periods of tension at the Legislature. There is always someone ready to capitalize on mistakes. Members walk a fine line between being enemies and being part of the same exclusive club. They can expect no quarter from each other, but will usually protect each other from outside threats. This may explain their avid pursuit of trespassers on their members' privileges.

Gossip tends to be more of a problem for women; politics is still a man's game, and women can easily get a 'reputation' in the 1950's sense. This can place real limits on a woman's behaviour and effectiveness, since she has to be careful about the social aspect of operating around Queen's Park. One woman interviewed has simply stopped having meals alone with male colleagues. A lot of business gets done at Queen's Park over private meals, especially away from the legislative building.

Good reputations are ultimately based on competence and effectiveness over a long period of time. A strong element of personality is involved as well. This is politics, and no-one can be really successful without being liked.

Paradoxically, in the short term, nastiness and condescension can be more effective than affability. In an environment where knowledge is power, people tend to react to perceived authority by trying to get on its good side. There is an underlying assumption that only those who have power can afford to act superior, so this attitude may bring short-term gains.

In the long-run, however, this behaviour is rarely successful, because people quickly size up where people really are in the power structure, and punish pretention. Again, the proof is in the pudding, since really powerful people are generally charming, at least on the surface. Nasty people find themselves stalled at the middle levels, or relegated to jobs

where they don't deal with people; in politics, these are the powerless jobs.

Political success, in and out of the Legislature, is largely based on interpersonal skills. The trick is to get what you want without causing someone else to lose face. Therefore, it is a combination of political effectiveness and personality that counts. As a new member, Chris Ward built his reputation partly by showing himself to be one of the best hecklers in the House. Heckling is hardly a trivial skill; it has allowed Ward to demonstrate both political acumen and a sense of humour.

Some members are highly respected for their toughness and competence, but are not counted really "good" members because they lack a sense of humour. Others are well liked, but not taken very seriously. Being taken seriously is important at Queen's Park, taking yourself seriously is fatal. A sense of humour is essential at the Legislature, but 'lightweight' is the most damning of labels.

Self-deprecation is appreciated, partly because people are so aware of the hierarchy of power. Self-important behaviour reminds others of their status, implicitly threatening their self-esteem. David Peterson seems like a down-to-earth kind of guy, who counts himself lucky and likes a good joke. Larry Grossman likes to be addressed as 'Leader' in the same way Bill Davis insisted on 'Premier'. The old saw 'never kid a kidder' may be adapted to Queen's Park; it's risky to play power politics in a place full of politicians. Bruised egos come back to haunt.

Status at Queen's Park is displayed in a number of more subtle ways. The key measure of status is influence. This is not simply because influence carries power with it, but because influence is the only real reward for success at Queen's Park. If you are good, you are rewarded with more responsibility, and your opinion is taken into account by decision-makers. Because this is true, there tends to be great status in having access to decision-makers; it is seen as a badge of influence.

Seating arrangements in the House can be a measure of status, but it is not simply a question of distance from the leader or a position on the front bench. Premier Peterson gave front bench seats to several long-time members who had been passed over for cabinet seats. New members are always placed on the backbench, even if they are being groomed for greater power. Elinor Caplan's presence on the Liberal front bench despite her official "backbencher" status, indicates that her real influ-

ence has not waned. The presence of female and visible minority group members directly behind each party leader, is a tactic for the television cameras rather than a measure of their actual importance.

Therefore, while Chamber seating arrangements *are* indicators of status, their interpretation requires subtlety and familiarity with Queen's Park personalities and history. Political staff tend to inherit the status of their member, though they can develop independent reputations, as in the case of the minister who performs poorly despite his excellent and respected staff.

While friendliness and sociability are important at the Legislature, friendship can be problematic. One experienced staff person put it this way: "there are no friendships in politics, only alliances." Genuine friendships certainly do form, generally among people who work closely together and develop a great trust. But life at Queen's Park is a game played with people who don't trivialize game playing; unless you have the stomach to continue to play into your private life, it is best to keep friendships superficial.

The NDP members may differ in this respect, since it appears they have closer personal contacts and socialize more within the caucus. This may be because the New Democratic Party is the political reflection of a broader social and ideological movement, so that party members have a deeper sense of group identity. It may also be a defense mechanism of the perennial runners-up, or banding together in an environment where often mindless 'red-baiting' is considered acceptable. The NDP is also a smaller caucus, in which offices are physically grouped together more closely than the other two parties. The staff union offers further cause for group contact and identification.

Conservative social functions are more fun than Liberal parties, with members and staff alike mingling and enjoying themselves. There is a difference to Liberal parties; they are full of cliques, and members and ministers tend to make appearances rather than join in. Liberal parties seem like political rather than social occasions. These differences seem to be more a function of being in or out of power than of inherent characteristics of the parties. I have been told that these characterizations were just the opposite when the Conservatives were in power.

Government caucuses are larger and their offices are more spread out, so people know fewer of their colleagues. Internal competition is

commensurate with greater opportunities in government, so there is more pressure to work in social situations; people have their political guard up. Ministers have greater demands on their time, and the trappings of office and status set them apart. Government members must be more careful to monitor their social behaviour, since they are watched more closely by the press.

Caucus socializing may substantiate the theory that the only parties are the "Ins" and the "Outs". This axiom signifies the universal aspect of culture at Queen's Park: *plus ça change, plus c'est pareil*. Institutional and psychological structures surround each Queen's Park sub-culture – government, official opposition, third party – causing successive groups to act in similar ways. Cultural variations across space are maintained through time. The extraordinary stability of roles played by the three parties at Queen's Park has tested this theory only minimally. The present period of change may test it more fully.

V

Partisanship is the natural corollary of politics. The formal structure of Queen's Park is based on partisan differences and confrontation politics. The informal culture of Queen's Park, however, is in many ways based on non-partisanship.

When asked what qualities made good members, almost every person interviewed included some variation on the following:

People who can stick to their principles and fight hard for what they believe in, but who can also rise above partisan politics.

Rising above is interpreted in the political sense – putting aside party differences to come to creative compromise; and in the personal sense – respecting other members for their beliefs and maintaining friendly relations.

Business at the Legislature, especially in minority government, is organized around floating coalitions. This is the tactical element of legislative politics, where parties support or oppose one another depending on the issue, and they trade votes for future considerations. This is a relatively open process wherein the players weigh the odds for strategical advantage. Ultimately, each party is out for itself, and this is

accepted without rancour. One night political stands can make strange bedfellows; long-term loyalty is neither expected nor offered.

Loyalty within caucuses is more problematic. Political loyalty has fewer rewards than disloyalty has punishments. There are no guarantees that backing a winner will improve one's own position, and party stalwarts are often passed over. Backing a loser usually keeps a member out of the new power structure, and bucking party discipline can stall a promising career. Loyalty is demanded, therefore, but tends to be negatively reinforced. This can breed resentment, particularly in the government caucus.

Cross-party political relationships are carried on and symbolized largely by the house leaders. They meet every Thursday, together with party whips, to hash out the legislative schedule for the following weeks. Their staffs are in constant contact throughout the week. This process of consultation emerged out of minority government between 1975 and 1981, but has become a permanent fixture of Queen's Park culture.

The house leaders are the internal statesmen of the Legislature, coming together to parley, not about policy, but about the business they all have in common, the business of the House. They might not always be able to change outcomes or avoid partisan squabbles in the House, but the ritual of communication is essential. Without it, the atmosphere of the House would quickly decay. Any government can use its prerogatives to push the House to its bidding, but as a long-term strategy this can be disastrous. Opposition parties have myriad ways to make a government's life in the House miserable, and legislative arrogance is a charge most governments try to avoid.

The consultation process, then, is more than ritual. Very few members are familiar with the *Standing Orders* so that the house leaders play a mechanistic role, facilitating the smooth and proper running of the House. They act as liaison between the caucuses and the offices of the Clerk and the Speaker. All parties have an interest in having the House business smoothly orchestrated; members are united in their desire to avoid evening, Friday and Summer sittings!

Similarly, in policy areas, the House works best when ministers are in touch with their critics, and treat them with a measure of respect. Last session, one of the government's priority bills was stopped because neither the minister nor his legislative assistant was careful enough to

cultivate opposition support and the two opposition parties swung a deal. Another critic felt a minister had gone back on an agreement, and was quite successful in making trouble for the minister for the rest of the session.

Committees, which have been strengthened in recent years, are designed to be working forums less partisan than the House. Committees commonly deal with amendments to bills, hear public submissions, investigate certain matters or study broad philosophical issues like free trade or privatization in the health care system. Members certainly use committees to promote party policies, but it is easier to get down to business away from the stage of the Chamber.

Seniority, and its corollary of lengthy political apprenticeship, is less important than it used to be at Queen's Park. New members with talent can rise quickly within the ranks, and committees give them the opportunity to display that talent. Increased opportunity means more competition among newer members, and defensiveness in older members. This is exacerbated by increasing concentration of power in the cabinet and growing dissatisfaction among backbenchers concerning their role in the legislative process. It is a reflection of the professionalization of the Legislature, which is eroding the clubbishness of Queen's Park.

Traditional parliamentary ideals of public service and loyal opposition are embodied in working relationships across party lines. There is compromise, occasional collusion and lots of politicking, but commitment to political ideals and the interests of the province can save it from becoming amoral. The delicate balance between diplomacy and expediency depends on the efforts and the values of the members.

The other side of non-partisanship is the personal side. Most MPPs realize that they share an experience and identity as members which goes far beyond partisan differences. This is most clearly seen when committees travel, and members mix freely across party lines. Sometimes a member will act as host if the committee is in his home riding. In fact, it is considered a bit off *not* to join in the socializing. Away from the arena of Queen's Park, away from their staffs, the members seem to relax, and to treat each other as colleagues, rather than enemies. These trips create lasting relationships and give members common experiences which bind them together, helping to bridge partisan gulfs at the Legislature.

Members' behaviour in the House also illustrates how their identification as members tempers their identification as partisan operatives. If Queen's Park is a club, then MPPs are the only real members. In the House they may yell across the floor, point their fingers and quiver with moral indignation, but when the action moves elsewhere, the same members are commonly seen smiling and joking with each other. More so than in other legislatures, members move freely about the Chamber, though this has been curtailed somewhat by the glare of television cameras. Observers are often bewildered by this strange mixture of vitriol and chumminess, but it simply reflects the formal and informal aspects of Queen's Park culture.

Members generally agree that political attacks can be as strong as anyone can make them, as long as they do not venture into the realm of personal attack. Argument, in the classical sense, is admired. Oratorical skill is highly valued, increasingly so because of its rarity. Members know that everyone has a job to perform and most accept that the system works best when that job is performed well, despite the short-term inconvenience that may cause individual members. There is always the underlying realization that, were places changed, the victim would be the aggressor, and so should ask for no quarter.

Some members are respected for their tough, reasoned arguments and thorough knowledge of the issues. Other critics are not only disliked, but discounted because of the sheer venom of their attacks. A minister is quite likely to say "Oh, it's only so and so, at it again!" and ignore the critic. A measure of non-partisanship can make a member a more effective partisan fighter. Only those with the respect of the House are listened to, and reasonable argument, based on issues rather than emotionalism, is respected.

Despite all this, Queen's Park is becoming more, rather than less partisan. This is partly a result of the professionalization of the Legislature. Politics is now a full-time occupation or career, so members have a greater personal stake in partisan success. Most legislative activities used to take place in the House, and members would spend more time listening to each other. Now, members are too busy to attend the House except for Question Period and for House duty or when they are involved in a specific item before the House.

Political staff tend to be more partisan than the members, and they

are a much bigger cultural component than they used to be. There are more political staff than ever before. They tend to be young, ambitious professionals who take their positions – and themselves – seriously. Limited avenues for promotion mean greater staff input. Political staff are often chosen for their partisan qualifications, and tend to be more exclusively tied to caucus sub-cultures. Political staff, therefore, are an increasingly important influence enhancing both professionalization and partisanship.

There are fewer opportunities for members to mix socially across party lines. Members used to dine and drink together before and after night sittings (sometimes to the detriment of House business!) but night sittings were eliminated in 1986. Until the mid-1970s, out-of-town members used to rent rooms at the Royal York Hotel, taking advantage of a special rate, and the members' reference library in the West Lobby was the site of a regular cross-party poker game. Now, occasional Press Gallery parties, Speaker's receptions and intern or constituency functions may supplement committee travel in bringing MPPs together socially. Long-time Liberal member and Queen's Park legend Eddie Sargent for years kept a friendly late night hockey league going at Maple Leaf Gardens. The practice seems anomalous now, anachronistic; it is unlikely to survive his retirement.

Some believe that as all three parties crowd the centre of the political spectrum, they increasingly fall on emotional partisanship to mask their lack of real political differences. The Caplan and Fontaine affairs have soured relations somewhat, making members, especially new members nervous about cross-party friendships. New members already tend to be more partisan than their more experienced colleagues. Having just come through their first electoral battle, new members often see the opposing parties as the enemy. As older members leave, there will be fewer to pass on the values of non-partisan behaviour and of cross-party friendship. Queen's Park is far from the armed camp atmosphere evident in the House of Commons, but the potential for it to mirror Ottawa is there.

VI

A great deal can be divined about a culture from its heroes. It is indicative of the variable nature of Queen's Park culture that many of its heroes were at one time goats. David Peterson is the most notable

case in point; his is a Cinderella story. He is now a hero because he was right when it counted – he pulled off a political coup of major proportions and has maintained his success remarkably well. Yet Peterson remains essentially a hero of the Liberal sub-culture.

The primary hero of Queen's Park culture is, without doubt, Robert Nixon. He is the most universally admired, liked, trusted and respected person at Queen's Park, because he so clearly embodies the cultural values of the Legislature. He represents parliamentary tradition, enduring political success, competence, non-partisan fairness and self-deprecating good humour. He places high value on the human relationships of Queen's Park. He has been able to play the game for twenty-five years with his humanity intact, and without giving in to the forces of Ego stalking the halls of the Legislature. He has never forgotten the guys at Earl's Garage.

There are other, more specialized heroes, admired for one quality or another. Stephen Lewis for his superb intellect, ideological commitment and oratorical skills. Donald MacDonald, Jim Renwick and Jim Bullbrook for similar reasons. Jim McGuigan and Bob Elgie for their decency and humanity. Elie Martel, Eddie Sargent and Vern Singer because they were unique characters. Tom Wells and Ross McLellan for their political acumen. Andy Brandt and Richard Johnston for their quiet forcefulness and reasonable style.

A lot of these heroes are either gone or are going from Queen's Park, and it is unclear who will replace them. Most people interviewed lamented the loss of oratorical skill and personal style from the Chamber. Increasing professionalization and the homogenizing effect of television may explain this change. There is less tolerance for the 'characters' and increasing pressure to perform and to conform to the model of the full-time political professional. Real debate declines as members tend to read prepared speeches with an eye to the 30-second clip on the six o'clock news.

When Robert Nixon leaves, the culture of Queen's Park will suffer a serious shock. Newcomers will lose the cultural focus and force he embodies, and everyone will lose his reliable standard of values and behaviour. Any culture needs present as well as past heroes to help define and unify itself. But Queen's Park is increasingly producing stars rather than heroes; political success stories rather than local legends. It

is unclear who will carry on and teach the values and culture of Queen's Park: an important task as the Legislature faces a tremendous influx of new members and political bandwaggoners.

VII

Queen's Park is a culture in transition. It is a place anchored in nineteenth-century traditions of courtliness and public service, increasingly filled with competitive, ambitious, twentieth-century individuals. Professionalism wars with traditionalism, especially as new members and young staff advisors begin to dominate. The American style of brokerage and businesslike politics appeals to those who find the politesse of Queen's Park frustrating.

The clubbishness of Queen's Park is generally agreed to be fading, and with it, the old boys' network and cronyism that once dominated. Queen's Park is no longer "a glorified county council". Patronage has become 'conflict of interest', opposition has become more effective and the government is held more accountable for its actions. Newer members are impatient with the party discipline and political apprenticeship which represent traditional group values in the caucus system. The Chamber is more representative of Ontario's diverse population, and less patriarchal with the addition of female members. These are positive changes on the whole, which have opened government, and made our legislative system more responsible and less parochial.

Yet these changes have also wrought a fundamental change in the culture of Queen's Park. It is still a remarkably friendly place, much more "homey" than the House of Commons, but it is losing its flair of individuality. So much that is vital to Queen's Park culture is based upon individual relations: informal networking, partisan behaviour, legislative business. But the members are becoming less individual; the 'characters' are leaving and being replaced with slick, professional and cautious politicians. Queen's Park is becoming at the same time more bland and more self-important.

During the present period of transition, leadership and symbolic management will be pivotal. David Peterson managed his ascent to power with incredible deftness because, unlike Frank Miller, he proved himself to be an excellent symbolic manager. Potentially, Peterson can play a major role in Queen's Park cultural adaptation and survival, but

he is also a chief motivating force behind the changes that are occurring.

Peterson is changing the face of Ontario government, based on his experience trapped in opposition by the smug clubbishness of the declining Davis years. This is an admirable effort. The question is whether Queen's Park can make the transition to an efficient, practical, professional legislature without sacrificing the small-scale, homey charm that is its essence.

1987

- 1 The material in this paper is based largely on my own observations of Queen's Park, plus fifteen interviews conducted during June, 1987, with new, old and former Members of the Legislature, assembly and caucus staff and political observers. Unattributed quotations were taken from these interviews. Ultimately, responsibility for all opinions and conclusions is my own. I would like to take this opportunity to thank those interviewed for their time, interest and valuable insights.
- 2 John VanMaanen, "Reclaiming Qualitative Methods for Organizational Research: A Preface," in John VanMaanen (ed.) *Qualitative Methodology*, (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1983), 11-12.
- 3 Legislative Assembly of Ontario, *Debates*, Jan. 15, 1987, 4581.
- 4 For many of the ideas regarding Members' relation with the Press, I am indebted to David Docherty, "The Relationship Between the Press and the Private Member in Ontario Politics," Ontario Legislature Internship Paper, June, 1985.
- 5 *Ibid.*

The ABC's of Being an MPP: The Role Socialization of New Legislators at Queen's Park¹

JULIA LYNDON DEANS

Introduction

Patrick Reid, the former MPP for Rainy River, was first elected to the Ontario Legislature in 1967, when he was 24 years old. A month after the election, he received a telegram announcing the first Liberal caucus meeting. He recalled:

We arrived in Toronto – I suppose there were about 28 of us at the time – got to the Legislature and were directed to the Liberal caucus office (now the office of the Leader of the Opposition), where we had a short caucus meeting. I remember Robert Nixon greeting us and thanking us for running – particularly for winning – and saying the House would be meeting sometime in the New Year. Then he said he would take us on a tour of the building. We went down to the bottom of the stairs in the main lobby and Nixon said, "The library is through there, the House is right upstairs and thank you very much, I'll see you in the new year!"

Times have certainly changed since 1967. Three weeks after the May 2, 1985 general election, newly-elected members from all three parties were given a comprehensive two-day seminar, the topics of which ranged from services and offices to the more complex subjects of parliamentary procedure, workload, and priority setting. But such formal post-election meetings – whether of the 1967 or 1985 variety – are just one component of a new member's orientation to Queen's Park. Election and pre-nomination experiences are equally important. Almost all new members agree that no amount of orientation or previous experience completely prepares someone to be an MPP. The purpose of this paper is to better understand role socialization of MPPs at Queen's Park. Thus the paper examines the various stages of learning (pre-election, election, post-election and incumbency), as experienced and perceived by nine "new" members.